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Bush Rejects Sanctions Over Lithuania

*'This Is Munich,'
Landsbergis Says*

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, April 24—Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis said today that President Bush's decision to defer ordering any sanctions against Moscow in the Soviet secession crisis amounts to a political "Munich," a reference to Britain and France's attempt to appease Nazi Germany in 1938.

"We feared that America might sell us. Let people decide whether that has happened," Landsbergis said. "I don't understand whether it is possible to sell the freedom of one group of people for the freedom

of another. If that is so, then of what value is the idea of freedom itself? . . . This is Munich."

Ever since Lithuania declared independence March 11, Landsbergis has been searching for stronger support from the United States and the West. Legislators in Vilnius had expected the U.S. administration to take some economic measures against Moscow today. But the Bush administration has so far been reluctant to sharpen the tone of its rhetoric, much less impose sanctions, for fear of endangering relations with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

The Kremlin, for its part, will continue to exert economic and political pressure on Lithuania whether or not the U.S. administration and the West decide in the future to

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*Punishing Moscow
Would Be 'Mistake'*

By Ann Devroy and Don Oberdorfer
Washington Post Staff Writers

President Bush yesterday decided not to retaliate against the Soviet Union for its crackdown against Lithuania, saying that sanctions against Moscow could set back freedom around the world.

Bush emerged from an hour-long discussion with congressional leaders to offer a lengthy, emotional explanation for his reluctance to penalize the Soviets, at least for now. Quoting baseball philosopher Yogi Berra, Bush said, "I don't want to make the wrong mistake."

Saying he had put off a decision

on whether to impose any sanctions, the president said: "I'm concerned about the freedom of Poland; I'm concerned about the evolution of freedom in the other Baltic states whose incorporation we haven't recognized and I'm concerned that we not inadvertently do something that compels the Soviet Union to take action that would set back the whole cause of freedom around the world."

With the Soviet political and economic systems under great strain and President Mikhail Gorbachev scheduled to arrive in this country for a summit meeting just five weeks from today, Bush said this is "a very complex time" in which to make a decision about the U.S. sanctions he had promised to consider. Last Tuesday, Bush said he

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VYTAUTAS LANDSBERGIS

...feared that America might sell us"

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PRESIDENT, From A1

would consider "appropriate responses" if the Soviets cut oil and gas supplies to Lithuania, which they subsequently did. Last Wednesday, Secretary of State James A. Baker III said the Soviets were putting bilateral economic contacts "at risk" by pressuring Lithuania. On Friday, the White House said sanctions against Moscow would be announced after consultations with the allies and Congress.

But yesterday Bush and other administration officials indicated that they were not prepared to put Lithuanian independence ahead of other policy objectives they consider more important, nor to create false hopes in Lithuania that U.S. backing can win concessions from Moscow. "You have got to look at the real options," Bush said, adding: "I am old enough to remember Hungary in 1956, where we exhorted people to go to the barricades and a lot of people are left out there all alone" when Soviet tanks suppressed the Hungarian revolution.

White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater said that after consulting its allies, the administration concluded that it had no support for retaliatory moves, even the relatively mild bilateral economic options that were on the table. Over the weekend, European foreign ministers expressed concern about events in Lithuania, but declined to take any action.

In his public remarks yesterday Bush indicated that he saw the Lithuanian problem in a long-term context. "I'd like to see the progress in the Soviet Union go forward without having some elements that are opposing Gorbachev on all of this crack down and set the clock back to a day we all remember of Cold War mentality and confrontation," he said.

One official said Bush had spoken privately of the Lithuanian crisis in terms of the way it might look decades from now. "He said 'I don't want people to look back 20 or 40 years from now and say, that's where everything went off track. That's when progress stopped,'" the official quoted Bush as saying.

Another senior official noted that there was "virtually no pressure" to impose sanctions from Congress, the American public or the press. Yesterday, Democratic leaders of both houses issued statements supporting Bush, and what criticism there was in Congress was mild.

The reluctance to penalize the Soviets reflects a widespread though mostly unspoken sense in

the administration that the Lithuanians have pressed their case for independence too quickly and too radically and been too unwilling to compromise, officials said. Bush alluded to that perception yesterday when he called for "both sides" to begin negotiations. Gorbachev, he said, "has indicated a willingness to do this. The Lithuanians have indicated some willingness to do this."

A senior official at the White House and another at the State Department yesterday noted Lithuania's small population, relative unimportance strategically and the fact that the economic sanctions Moscow has imposed in an effort to pressure the Lithuanians has been less than devastating. Said one official, "No one is starving. The Soviets made a point of that."

When the administration's senior officials met Monday night without aides present to discuss the situation, a number of lower-ranking officials predicted that some form of sanctions against Moscow were imminent. The National Security Council did consider postponing talks on a series of economic concessions that Moscow ardently seeks. Negotiations on several of those matters resumed yesterday in Paris.

Bush and his senior aides left the impression that if conditions worsen in Lithuania, sanctions might still be imposed. That door was left open, an official said, "so the Soviets understand that no sanctions today doesn't mean no sanctions ever."

Bush expressed hope that a Lithuanian delegation now in Moscow for talks with Soviet officials could produce an end to the stalemate over the process and pace of Lithuania's drive for independence. Such talks, Bush said, have "a great deal of potential for the freedom that we seek for the Lithuanians, and yet have it done in a way that is not egregious to the Soviet Union. . . . Therein lies the answer."

Bush himself ruled out major retaliatory moves, saying any steps he might take "are apt to be on the economic side." Fitzwater said the administration had ruled out any military response, any slowdown in the arms control negotiation process and any effect on U.S.-Soviet grain agreements.

Administration officials denied that conversations between Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze on Lithuania over the past week had produced any specific pledges on Soviet actions or an affirmative decision to grant the Soviets a reprieve. Baker is expect-

ed to see Shevardnadze again in Berlin Friday of next week as the two ministers prepare for big-power discussions on the future of Germany. Officials did not rule out a new series of direct contacts between the two ministers on the Lithuanian situation even before then.

Over objections from Baker, the Senate Appropriations Committee yesterday included in an emergency omnibus spending bill \$10 million to buy and staff an embassy in Lithuania if the United States formally recognizes the country as an independent state.

Fitzwater said Bush had not answered a letter from Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis nor had he or other members of the government had any direct contact with Lithuanian officials. Fitzwater said contacts have remained through "private parties."

Fitzwater said in the session Bush had with congressional leaders, only two of them, Rep. Dante B. Fascell (D-Fla.) and Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), suggested the president take new steps in the crisis. Fascell said he has suggested delaying the summit until the Lithuanian situation became clearer "perhaps in the fall," and Helms suggested Bush formally recognize Lithuania and exchange ambassadors.

Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell (D-Maine) said he agreed with the president's position "so far" but urged some immediate steps toward trade sanctions against the Soviets. House Speaker Thomas S. Foley (D-Wash.) also issued a statement of general support.

Both Mitchell and Senate Minority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) said Bush emphasized when he met with them yesterday that he had not made any decisions. Dole said he told the senators that he "wanted to weigh ideas that were suggested" at the meeting for possible future action. "I think he just wants to be very careful," Dole told reporters after the meeting.

Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said in a speech yesterday that he would "oppose extending new economic benefits and rewards to the Soviet leadership at the same time it is starving Lithuanians of food and fuel." Specifically, he said, it would be wrong to extend most-favored-nation trade status to the Soviets or "endorse any new trade agreement with the Soviets while Lithuania is denied its rightful status."